

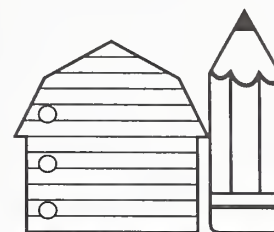
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# Ag in the Classroom

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



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# Notes

A bi-monthly newsletter for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to help students understand the important role of agriculture in the United States economy. For information, contact the AITC Director, Room 4307, South Bldg., USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250-0991. 202/720-7925.

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## Scientists Aid Teachers at Agro-Environmental Expo

Some of the best environmental science education materials today focus on the food and fiber system. But how can busy teachers evaluate what's available—or be sure they're seeing the latest and best curriculum packages?

For teachers in the Atlanta area, the task is a little easier. More than 100 teachers took part in the Atlanta Regional Agro-Environmental Expo sponsored by the faculty and staff of USDA's Georgia Experiment Station.

"Traditionally, agricultural experiment stations have been involved with higher education," says Jerry Johnson, geneticist and co-chair of the Science Education Committee at the Georgia Experiment Station. "We're trying to use our facilities to be more involved with K-12 education."

The day-long Agro-Environmental Expo was one way the scientists try to achieve that goal. Teachers who received the flyer announcing the Expo were promised that the day would provide "the newest and coolest instructional resources in the environmental sciences." It did. In concurrent sessions, more than 100 teachers, all responsible for teaching science to students in grades 4-9, tried out some of the best educational resources available in the environmental sciences, including those developed by Ag in the Classroom, 4-H, Environmental Education Centers, Project Learning Tree, the Beef Board and Egg Commission, and Garden Earth.

They entered a soil pit to learn about the layers of the underground world beneath their feet. They saw how farmers ensure an environmentally friendly future by caring for their animals, plants, land, and water. They tasted nutritious foods.

"If we visit a classroom, we can have an impact on 30 students," says Johnson. "If we spend the same amount of time training 30 teachers, we can have a much greater impact."

As a result of the efforts of the USDA scientists, four nearby schools have planted wheat on their grounds. The researchers developed a unit, "From Seed to Sandwich," that helps teach the science involved in wheat cultivation.

The experiment station also participates in two mentorship programs. "We're getting the information out that there are many careers in agriculture, and farming is just one of them," Johnson says.



*The Agro-Environmental Expo, sponsored by the Georgia Experiment Station, helped teachers learn more about science activities.*

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## From the Director:

We are happy to bring you some information on not only exciting agricultural programs but two exceptional educators in this edition.

Jerry Johnson has stepped outside his traditional role as a geneticist to reach K-12 educators with accurate information about agriculture. It is our hope that by featuring the work of Jerry and his colleagues we will encourage more scientists to follow suit. I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank both Jerry and Marilyn Johnson for their hard work in developing the Agro-Environmental Expo and all those who made it a reality.

Our second educator deserving high praise is Xris Blonk. Xris (pronounced Chris) and her mother, also an educator, have introduced soybeans and the scientific method to inner city students with no direct exposure to agriculture. Their efforts are to be commended as the

students now know that agriculture is important to everyone's daily life.

The second in our new Internet series is The Beef Industry's "CowTown America." Students will find the diary entries a source of interesting reading which can be put to a wide array of uses.

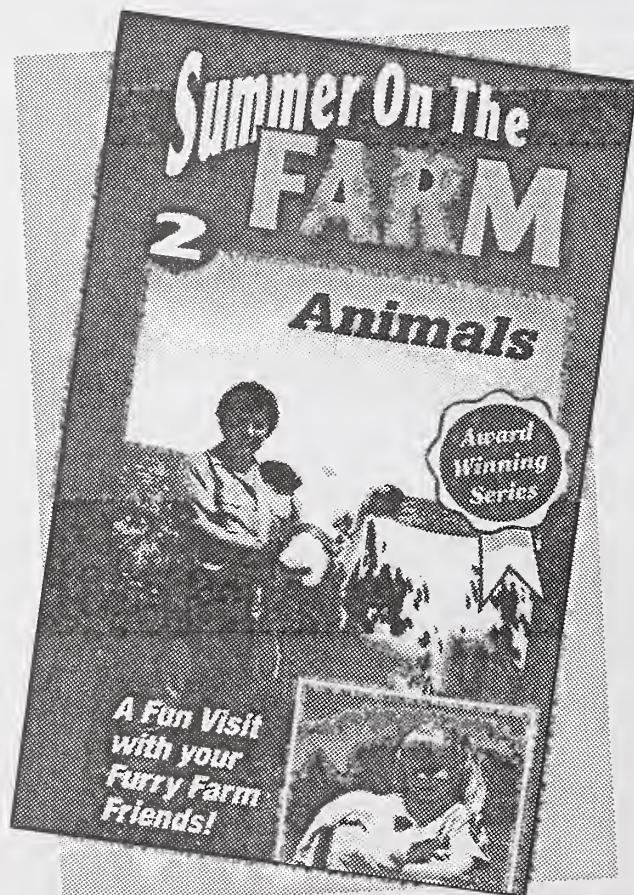
*Going Lobstering* completes our series on Jerry Pallotta's books. We hope Jerry will be joining us for the 1997 Conference in New England.

Please continue to share information and ideas with us for upcoming issues of "Notes."

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth A. Wolanyk*

Elizabeth A. Wolanyk, Director



## Videos Bring Agriculture Into the Classroom

In a time when children may have no first-hand experience with agriculture, videos can play an important role in developing agricultural literacy. The three videos described on these pages are all designed to give young children a close-up view of our food and fiber system.

**Summer on the Farm II: Animals** (30 minutes, grades K-5)

*Summer on the Farm II* is the second in a series of educational videos produced, directed, and narrated by farmer Chris Fesko. The video presents factual information about the animals on a farm presented in a style that should capture the attention of elementary school children. (A comedic scene of children chasing a calf is filmed in black and white and shown in a speeded-up, Keystone Cops style.)

The video emphasizes the development of a calf to a milking cow. Other animals, including pigs, chickens, ducks, sheep, and even horses are also introduced. An accompanying parent/teacher manual supplements the information in the video. (Fesko says it provides answers to the questions she is usually asked by visitors on her farm.)

*Continued on page 4*



## Sixth Graders Learn Scientific Method—And Much More

Like many sixth grade teachers, Xris Blonk wanted her students at W.B. Paterson Elementary School, Montgomery, Alabama, to learn to think like scientists. As an educator, she knew that “children are interested in anything to do with animals or growing.” So Blonk and her sixth graders decided to plant some soybeans and use the scientific method to conduct experiments.

“My children are from the inner city and most of them had never seen soybeans,” Xris says.

But even she was surprised by one student’s scientific hypothesis. Blonk had asked her students to think about the variables that might affect soybean growth. “One student remarked that I’m tall and I drink a lot of coffee. ‘I’ll bet if we put coffee on one soybean plant, it would grow taller than the others,’ the student predicted. And you know,” Blonk says with some amazement, “that turned out to be



To stimulate their reading—and to help them understand more about one agricultural crop, she challenged her students to bring in labels from foods that contained soybeans.

The children responded to the challenge. It wasn’t long before the classroom was filled with labels. “The children were absolutely amazed to discover that these plants we were growing in our classroom were such an important part of so many foods,” Blonk says.

the tallest plant in our room!” (This, of course, is why repeating an experiment to make sure the same results occur is so important!)

After reading about soybeans, the children used research skills to learn about George Washington Carver and some of the uses he developed for the crop. They even turned their observations about soybeans into poetry.

Including agricultural activities helps students in all subject areas, Xris has found. “When students get excited about one aspect of schooling, it begins to transfer to everything else,” she concludes.

*Students learn about the scientific method in Xris Blonk’s 6th grade.*



As in the previous *Summer on the Farm*, there is a strong emphasis on farm safety. The video is available to readers of *Ag Notes* for a special price of \$49.95 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling. Contact Chris Fesko Enterprises at 1-800-747-6470.

**Fruit . . . Close Up and Very Personal** (35 minutes, preschool or primary grades)

Like other titles in the "Close Up" series, this video is not narrated. The film's producers believe this format encourages children to communicate and use their imaginations.

Children see the entire fruit cycle from planting through cultivation, harvesting, packaging, and transportation. Adults, too, will be interested in the scenes of cranberry bogs and blueberry harvesting.

Each fruit is drawn whole and in cross-section. A graphic symbol identifies how the fruit grows (for example, on a vine). Teachers or parents should view the video with children to help

them understand some of the symbols.

Short live vignettes are interspersed with the graphics. A whimsical soundtrack (Latin percussive instruments accompany the scenes of tropical fruits, while country-western tunes designate the melon family) adds to the entertainment value of the video.

*Fruit . . . Close Up and Very Personal* is available for \$14.95 plus \$3.00 shipping and handling. Contact Stage Fright Productions at 1-800-979-6800.

**Tractors, Cotton-Pickers and The Stuff Kids Wear** (30 minutes, ages 3 and up)

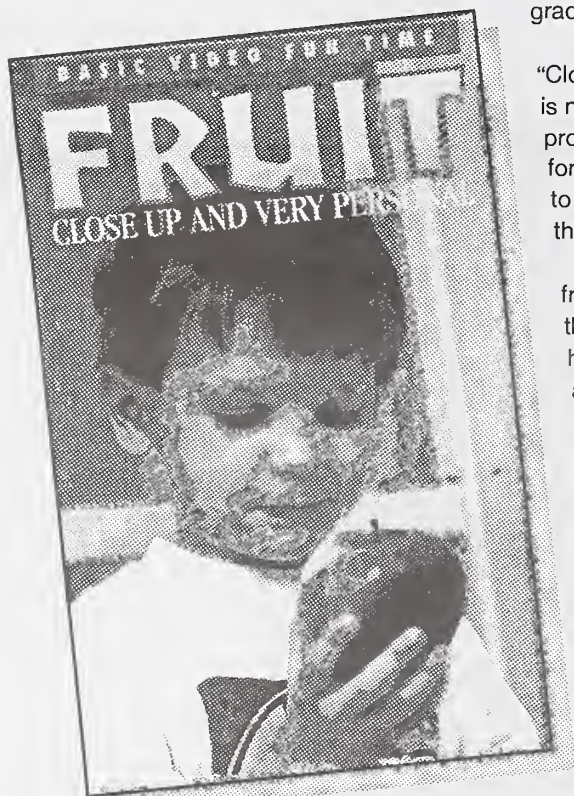
How does a tiny cotton seed become a favorite pair of blue jeans? This video can help children understand. From the struggles of a tiny silkworm

to the rumblings of a giant cotton harvester, *Tractors, Cotton-Pickers and The Stuff Kids Wear* helps children understand how natural fibers are transformed into their favorite clothing.

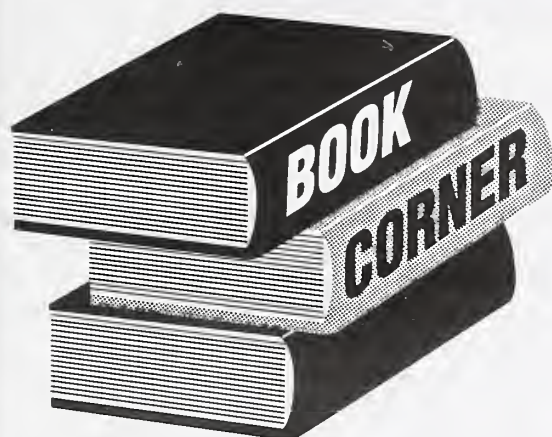
The child narrator and the kids'-eye perspective help even the youngest children understand how a raw material becomes a finished product. Much of the video focuses on cotton as it travels from field to factory. Other natural fibers include silk, wool (children should love the shots of the sheep dog herding sheep), and linen from flax. The scenes of silkworms spinning cocoons offer children a close-up view of a process they might otherwise never see.

Time-exposed shots show cotton plants blooming and then growing into cotton bolls (the narrator carefully explains to children that they're seeing a speeded-up version of a process that takes much longer in nature). Then children follow the cotton into the mill, through the process of dyeing and spinning, and finally to the factory where it becomes a pair of blue jeans.

*Tractors, Cotton-Pickers and The Stuff Kids Wear* is available from Just Our Size Videos for \$16.95 plus \$3.95 shipping and handling, if you mention *Ag in the Classroom*. Call 1-800-808-FARM.







## Book Corner: Going Lobstering

What's it like to go out on a lobster boat? Young readers can find out in *Going Lobstering*.

Author Jerry Pallotta has written an informative description of the age-old profession of lobstering. Linda and Erik, the main characters in the book, spend a day on the water with a lobsterman. During the day, the two children learn how a lobster trap works, how to measure lobsters to see if they're large enough to keep, and the difference between the lobster's "cruncher claw" and its "scissors claw."

They also learn some important information about lobster biology. Because lobsters are scavengers, they eat snails, fish, periwinkles, mussels, clams, crabs, and even other lobsters. "They would even eat pizza if they could find some," Pallotta says.

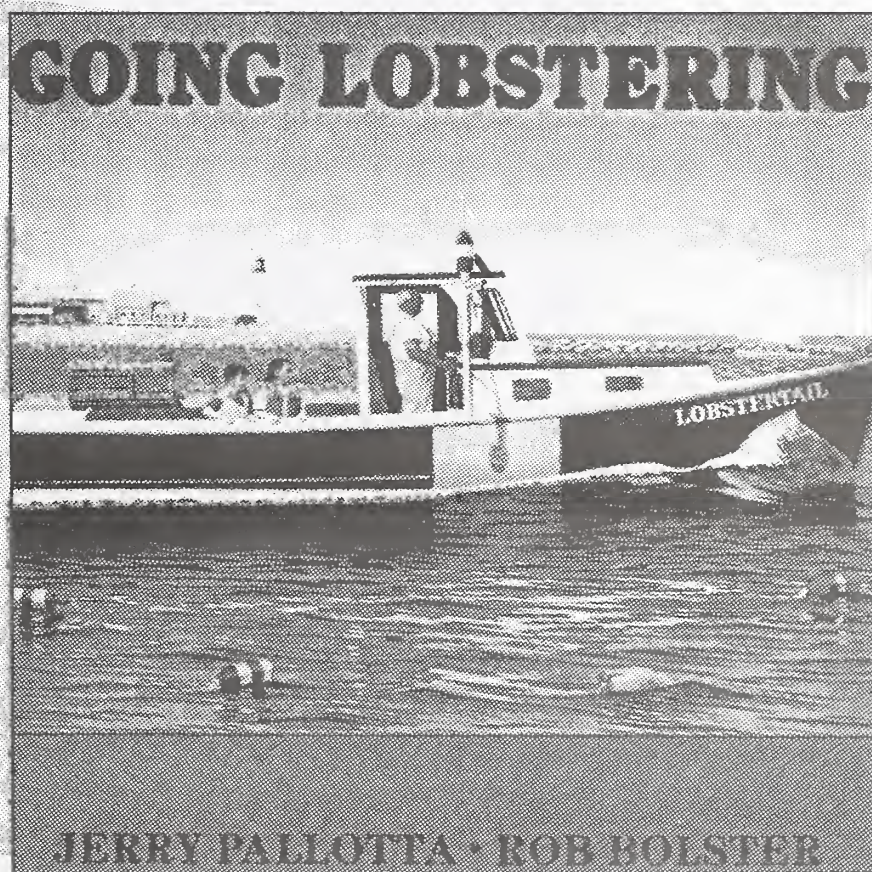
The children encounter a variety of sea life during their day on the water—including a shark. They learn a lot about lobsters and some important lessons about conservation: "Lobsters with eggs have to be thrown back into the ocean."

The detailed, realistic illustrations by Rob Bolster have a photographic quality.

By the end of *Going Lobstering*, children will probably feel as though they've spent a day on the water.

*Going Lobstering* was published in 1990 by Charlesbridge Publishing, 85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02172-4411. Cost is \$7.95. Contact the publisher at 617-926-0329.

*Going Lobstering is the  
next best thing to  
spending a day on a boat!*





## Young Children Learn Math by Counting and Sorting Animals

Children are fascinated with animals. Now a new set of math manipulative materials builds on that interest by helping young children learn to count, sort, and classify. *Animal Math*, developed by the Cuisenaire Company, helps students learn important math concepts while they're having fun with animals.

The 64-page book contains 36 open-ended hands-on activities designed for individual or cooperative exploration for students in grades K-2. The matching

Sorting/Counting Set includes both domestic and wild animals, each in two sizes. A set of fruits and vegetables is also available.

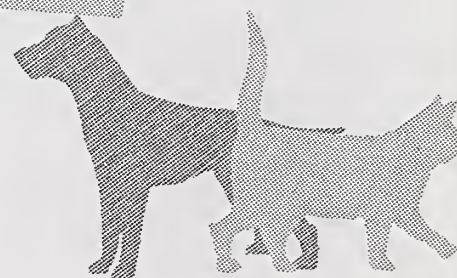
The manipulatives help children build bridges between their real-world experiences and the abstract or symbolic concepts that are the foundation of mathematics. Manipulatives allow children to have hands-on experiences that allow them to develop their ideas about numbers, quantities, measurement, and mathematical relationships.

For example, children can use the large and small animals to create and record patterns. They use drinking straws to create "fences" for their animals—actually moving the straws around to measure area.

The *Animal Math* book and a set of 80 miniature animals (enough for a group of 2 to 4 children) is available for \$21.75 from the Cuisenaire Corporation. For customer service information, call 1-800-237-3142.



Children's natural fascination with animals can help them learn math.

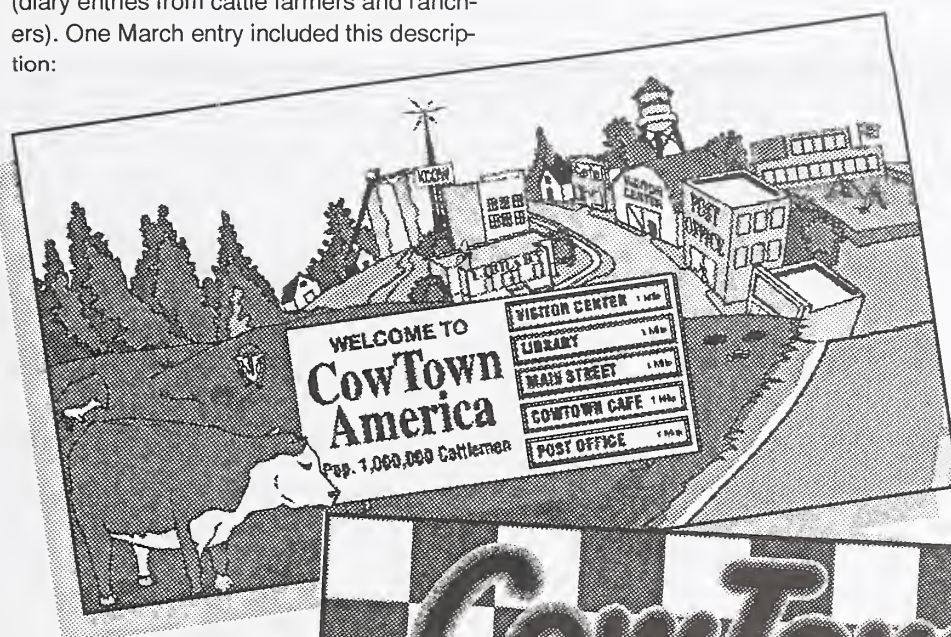




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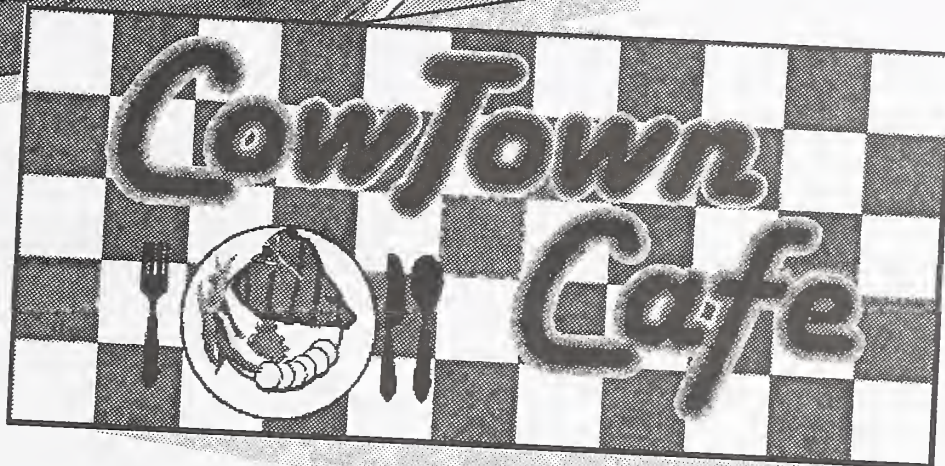
## Ag on the Internet: CowTown America

For the latest information about the beef industry, visit CowTown America on the Internet. This site on the World Wide Web offers visitors a chance to visit the CowTown Cafe (recipes), the Library (facts and figures about the beef industry) and the Post Office (diary entries from cattle farmers and ranchers). One March entry included this description:



*Right now the winds are blowing, it's snowing, and the wind-chill factor is awful. I'm writing this diary in between checking the heifer, because since this storm hit, we check them every hour. We already had three calves go through the "hot box" today, because they were so cold after birth with the wind, snow, and all. Our hot box is a very warm place to put the newborns into so they dry off and warm up in a fairly short period of time.*

The address for CowTown America is  
<http://www.cowtown.org/>





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